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TAGS: GR MARR MOPS NATO PGOV PREL PTER

SUBJECT: GREECE ENDS M.A.S.H. MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I. THOMAS COUNTRYMAN. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) At the end of May, Greece withdrew its unit of approximately 50 medical personnel serving in Afghanistan. According to Ambassador Ioannis Bourlogiannis, diplomatic advisor to the Minister of Defense, the unit was withdrawn following the end of its mandate and was replaced by a Czech medical unit. Bourlogiannis said there were no plans at this time to send any additional Greek troops to Afghanistan.

¶2. (C) MFA D2 Directorate for NATO deputy head Theodoros Daskarolis explained that the unit's mandate technically ended in February 2007, but Greece had extended its service for up to six months while a replacement unit from another ally was identified. Daskarolis said Greece had offered to send tanks (but no personnel to man or maintain them) to Afghanistan, but the offer had been rejected by the Afghan National Army (ANA). Greece maintains a unit of approximately 90 engineers in Afghanistan, and Daskarolis said there had been "no discussion" of their withdrawal. The engineering battalion does not have a limited mandate.

COMMENT

¶3. (C) Our understanding from both Greek and non-Greek NATO sources is that the MASH unit was well-respected for the services it provided to NATO and ANA personnel, as well as to Afghan civilians. In addition to providing medical treatment, the unit also trained Afghan physicians in emergency techniques. We utilized the experience of the unit a number of times to generate positive press about Greece's involvement in Afghanistan, which is usually misunderstood here. The withdrawal of the unit was handled very quietly, with little ceremony, following the usual Greek pattern of downplaying its foreign missions for domestic audiences. The return was not reported in the Greek press.

¶4. (C) The MASH unit was subject to the Greek government's caveats, which restricted its operations to Kabul. The Greek engineering battalion is subject to the same caveats. The Embassy will continue to press the GOG to remove the caveats on its troops and to do more to meet NATO requirements in Afghanistan. During his June 11 meetings in Athens, Under Secretary Burns QReQq% PE I!Ra%!&l)1\$ FM Bakoyiannis, and

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